

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 HERMOS 00340 242311Z

73

ACTION ARA-10

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : PINT, EGEN, MX

SUBJECT : LAND TENURE PROBLEM IN SOUTHERN SONORA

REF: HERMOSILLO 333

1. CONFISCATION OF PRIVATE LANDS IN YAQUI VALLEY REPORTED REFTEL HAS NOT, SO FAR, RESULTED IN ANY VIOLENCE. PRIVATE FARMERS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS HAVE ADOPTED POSITION THAT VIOLENCE OF ANY FORM WOULD BE COUNTER TO THEIR INTERESTS, AND HAVE ANNOUNCED THAT, INSTEAD, THEY WILL SEEK RELIEF IN THE COURTS, AFTER THE LOPEZ PORTILLO ADMINISTRATION TAKES OFFICE. THEY STRESS THAT ECHEVERRIA AND BARRA GARCIA HAVE COMMITTED FLAGRANT VIOLATION OF THE CONSTITUTION AND LAWS, HENCE THEIR RECOURSE IS TO THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM. HOWEVER, REALISTICALLY NO ONE BELIEVES THAT THIS CAN RESULT IN RESTORATION OF THE STATUS QUO ANTE. NOTWITHSTANDING LACK OF VIOLENCE, THE SITUATION IN SOUTHERN SONORA REMAINS VERY TENSE, MAINLY BECAUSE THERE IS WIDESPREAD FEAR THAT ECHEVERRIA AND BARRA HAVE NOT FINISHED WITH THEIR CONFISCATIONS OF LAND IN SONORA.

2. ACTUAL EXTENT OF THE CONFISCATIONS IN SONORA ON NOVEMBER 19
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 HERMOS 00340 242311Z

FAR EXCEEDED THE MOST PESSIMISTIC ESTIMATES, AND AMOUNTED TO

OVER 38,000M HECTARES OF IRRIGATED LAND AND OVER 60,000 OF RANCH LAND. ALTHOUGH AGRARIAN REFORM OFFICIALS AND CAMPESINO LEADERS CHARGED THAT ALL OF THIS LAND WAS IN THE POSSESSION OF ONLY SOME 80 PERSONS, THE PRIVATE FARMERS ORGANIZATIONS HAVE PROTESTED THAT THE ACTUAL NUMBER OF OWNERS EXPROPRIATED NUMBERS TEN TIMES THAT FIGURE. ON NOVEMBER 23, THE LEADING SONORA DAILY "EL IMPARCIAL" PUBLISHED A TWO PAGE SPREAD LISTING ALL OF THE DISPOSSESSED FARMERS, GROUPING THEM UNDER THE CAPITALIZED NAME OF THE ALLEGED LATIFUNDIST. OPPOSITE EACH NAME, THE UNATTRIBUTED LISTING GIVES THE AGE, MARITAL STATUS, CADASTRAL DESCRIPTION OF THE LAND, AND AREA OF LAND OWNED BY EACH INDIVIDUAL LISTED. IN ALMOST NO CASE DOES THE AMOUNT OF IRRIGATED LAND PER PERSON EXCEED 100 HECTARES, AND THEN ONLY BY A SMALL AMOUNT.

3. RELIABLE SOURCES IN THE MAYO VALLEY AROUND NAVOJOA, SONORA, ADVISE THAT THE NEXT BLOW OF THE AGRARIAN REFORM SECRETARIAT IS EXPECTED TO FALL THERE, PERHAPS DURING THE NIGHT OF NOVEMBER 25 - 26, AND THE MAYO FARMERS CREDIT UNION ALREADY KNOWS WHO WILL BE AFFECTED. THEY BELIEVE THAT ABOUT 5,000 HECTARES THEORETICALLY, BE COMMITTED IN VIOLATION OF THE LAW AND OF THE AMPAROS WHICH THE PRIVATE FARMERS INVOLVED HAVE BEEN GRANTED BY THE COURTS. HOWEVER, AS IN THE YAQUI VALLEY, RESORT TO THE COURTS WILL FOLLOW SOON AFTER THE TRANSFER OF PRESIDENTIAL POWERS.

4. REPORTS FROM NORTHERN SINALOA REACHING HERMOSILLO ARE THAT THERE, TOO, A YAQUI VALLEY TYPE OF EXPROPRIATION IS ANTICIPATED. ACCORDING TO THE REPORTS, THE SINALOA PRIVATE FARMERS HAVE OBTAINED NEW AMPAROS, VALID UNTIL DECEMBER 9, ENJOINING A WIDE VARIETY OF GOVERNMENTAL AUTHORITIES FROM ACTING. THESE ARE SAID TO RANGE FROM THE PRESIDENT TO VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE FEDERAL SECRETARIES AND THEIR STAFFS, INCLUDING THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION "FOR GOOD MEASURE." THE SAME SOURCES SAY THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN SINALOA HAS OFFERED TO SURRENDER UP TO TEN THOUSAND HECTARES FOR DISTRIBUTION TO CAMPESINOS, NOTING, HOWEVER, THAT THIS IS FAR LESS THAN THE LATTER AND THEIR LEADERS ARE DEMANDING.

5. THE WIDELY REPORTED PASSIVE STRIKE FOMENTED BY THE PRIVATE SECTOR HAS MET ONLY WITH LIMITED SUCCESS IN SONORA. THE BANKS IN HERMOSILO, WHICH IT WAS REPORTED YESTERDAY WOULD BE CLOSED, CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 HERMOS 00340 242311Z

DID OPEN, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE HAD VERY LITTLE BUSINESS DURING THE MORNING. RETAIL SHOPS ARE RESPONDING HAPHAZARDLY, WITH SOME OPEN AND OTHERS NOT. THERE IS COMPLETE CALM IN THE CITIES, AS BEST CAN BE DETERMINED FROM SPOT CHECKS. IN THE YAQUI AND MAYO VALLEYS, THE PRIVATE FARMERS HAVE AGAIN LINED UP THEIR FARM EQUIPMENT ALONG THE MAJOR HIGHWAYS IN SILENT PROTEST, AS THEY DID APPROXIMATELY ONE YEAR AGO. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE IS NO FARM WORK BEING DONE. PLANTING OF WHEAT, WHICH SHOULD BE IN

FULL SWING, WILL PROBABLY NOT RESUME UNTIL AFTER DECEMBER 1 ON LANDS STILL IN PRIVATE HANDS, WHILE MOST OF THE NEWLY ENDOWED EJIDATARIOS ARE ALSO IDLE, FOR LACK OF MACHINERY, CREDIT, SEEDS AND FERTILIZERS, AND EVEN OF FARMING SKILLS. THE PRESS HAS REPORTED THAT THIS IS NOT SURPRIZING, SINCE SOME OF THESE SUCCESSFUL LAND CLAIMANTS UNTIL RECENTLY PRACTICED SUCH UNRELATED OCCUPATIONS AS TAXI DRIVER. IN ADDITION, IT IS SAID, THEY NOW FIND THEMSELVES LEADERLESS WHILE THEIR ORGANIZATIONS' LEADERS HAVE GONE ON TO OTHER AREAS PRESSING OTHER CLAIMS FOR ADDITIONAL EXPROPRIATIONS.

5.

6. THE FEAR OF POTENTIAL VIOLENCE IN CONNECTION WITH THE RECENT EXPROPRIATIONS HAS RESULTED IN A SMALL INFLUX OF VISA APPLICANTS AT THIS POST. IN ADDITION, WE HAVE PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF NUMBERS OF PRIVATE FARMERS WHO HAVE SENT THEIR WIVES AND CHILDREN TO THE UNITED STATES TO SIT OUT THIS TRANSITION PERIOD. THERE IS CONSIDERABLE OPTIMISM THAT THINGS WILL IMPROVE UNDER LOPEZ PORTILLO, AND THAT THE RESULTANT RENEWED RPT RENEWAL OF CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE WILL GO A LONG WAY TO REVITALIZING THE BADLY SHAKEN ECONOMY OF THIS REGION.

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